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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 000281

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [KISL](#) [MY](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: PEACE PROCESS MOVING FORWARD

REF: A. 06 MANILA 4974

[1](#)B. 06 MANILA 4836
[1](#)C. 06 MANILA 4802

Classified By: DCM Paul W. Jones for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has radically downsized its territorial claims in response to the government's November 2006 offer of self-determination, according to the government's chief negotiator. The negotiator was optimistic that remaining territorial issues could be handled by special economic zones or privileges. After further progress on these issues, the next step was reconciliation between the leaders of the MILF and MNLF, which he believed the Malaysians and the Organization of Islamic Conference would actively support. The chief negotiator noted Malaysian Prime Minister Badawi's clear commitment to a successful peace agreement, a cautious Malaysian style to avoid embarrassing set-backs, and the firm Malaysian stance against rogue MILF commanders' harboring terrorists. DCM outlined Embassy ideas for another round of direct talks with the MILF, which the negotiator enthusiastically endorsed as critical to building MILF confidence and leverage over its rogue commanders. The negotiator recommended we brief the Malaysian facilitator before approaching the MILF. Our plan is to meet again with MILF leadership in Mindanao to describe and seek MILF support for the upcoming Balikatan humanitarian and civil-military operations, USAID projects, and ship visits, while underscoring the need for practical measures to capture terrorists. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) In a meeting with DCM on January 18, head of the Government negotiating panel with the MILF Silvestre C. Afable Jr. said that the peace process continued to move in the right direction. Afable praised Malaysian Prime Minister Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's commitment to the peace process, and described Malaysia facilitator Datuk Othman bin Abdul Razak as a "tough negotiator" who appeared determined to sever links between renegade MILF commanders and terrorists.

[1](#)3. (C) Peace Talks Update: Afable said the Malaysians had received a counter-proposal from the MILF in response to the Philippine government's offer of self-determination for Muslim majority areas of Mindanao from last November (ref b). Afable said the MILF had largely dropped the expansive territorial claims that had put the peace process at an impasse, and now only sought limited additional flexibility on territorial issues. Specifically the MILF sought special rights for MILF commanders in provinces outside Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and some form of land connection between Muslim areas in Central Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. Afable believed these concerns could be met by

creating special economic zones and special privileges such as free transit rights to MILF commanders, and was consulting with legal experts about such ideas. He expected to be invited to Kuala Lumpur soon for informal consultations on these issues before another round of MILF talks.

14. (C) MILF-MNLF Reconciliation: A final peace agreement hinges on reconciliation between the two Muslim insurgent organizations, the MNLF and MILF, Afable continued. Once there is clearer forward movement on the MILF peace talks, Afable expected Malaysian negotiator Othman to visit the Philippines to meet with, and press for reconciliation between, MILF Chairman Al-Haj Murad Ebrahim and MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari, who is currently jailed in Manila. The Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) would also support reconciliation, Afable believed. The Philippine government has not yet decided whether to release MNLF Chairman Misuari to attend a planned February 2007 GRP-MNLF-OIC tripartite meeting in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia to discuss further implementation of the 1996 MNLF peace agreement. Afable said the government has no qualms about the substance of such a meeting, but is concerned that Misuari could use the opportunity to grandstand against Manila in the Middle East. The Philippine government had tried to get the venue moved to Jakarta, but without success, Afable added.

16. (C) Separating MILF Commanders From Terrorists and U.S. Support: Afable said the MILF Central Committee needs time and encouragement to turn certain MILF commanders away from providing refuge to terrorists. DCM underscored continuing U.S. desire to help the peace process, and outlined ideas for another U.S. meeting with MILF leadership, to include DCM, USAID Director and the Commander of U.S. Joint Special Operations forces in the Philippines. The goal would be further to inform the MILF of potential U.S. humanitarian and

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assistance programs in MILF areas, as well as upcoming U.S. ship visits to General Santos and possibly Cotobato, while continuing to discuss plainly the need to sever ties with terrorists. Afable replied that direct dialogue between the U.S. Embassy and the MILF Central Committee was of "critical importance" to building confidence and trust in the peace process, and encouraging the MILF to resolve internal differences with hard-line commanders. He strongly supported such a meeting, and believed U.S. ship visits in Mindanao that provide visible humanitarian assistance could have a big and positive impact on the peace process. He recommended, however, that before discussing with the MILF leadership, we first brief Malaysian facilitator Othman, since it was likely the MILF would seek his views. We will be in separate contact with colleagues at Embassy Kuala Lumpur to request assistance in briefing Othman.

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